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THOUGHTS

RESPECTING THE

ENSUING CAMPAIGN

ON THE BORDERS OF ITALY, AND ITS PROBABLE ISSUE.

BY SIR JOHN SINCLAIR, BART.

INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE the commencement of the present Campaign on the borders of Italy, some pains had been taken, by the President of the Board of Agriculture, to ascertain its probable issue, with a view of enabling him to form an opinion, how far that Campaign, was likely to produce consequences, so favourable to the cause of Austria, and of England, as to compensate for the waste of blood and treasure it must necessarily occasion. The information he collected, was originally drawn up for his own consideration merely; but it is now printed, to gratify the curiosity of some of his friends, who were desirous of perusing it, and in particular, were anxious to know the history and character, of so distinguished an officer, as the Conqueror of Italy.

THE fate of Italy, will probably be determined, in the course of the ensuing Campaign. The result may depend on a variety of unforeseen and incidental circumstances. The merest accident, as the stumbling of a horse, a shower of rain, or the fortuitous swelling of a river, may decide it. At the same time, it may be guessed at, with some degree of probability, from a consideration of the state of the two armies, and from an examination of the characters of the two Generals, by whom they are commanded.

I. THE AUSTRIAN ARMY.

It is impossible to ascertain, with any degree of precision, the amount of the Austrian army destined for the borders of Italy. It is well known, that exaggerated accounts have always been circulated of the strength of the Imperial forces, at the commencement of each Campaign, and hence they have seldom at first succeeded, equal to the hopes entertained of them. They have afterwards, it is true, been reinforced; but had those reinforcements joined them at the beginning, more success might have been expected. It is said, in some accounts, that the Archduke Charles, will have under his command, from 100,000 to 120,000 men, but if he has 70,000, it is probably as much as the Emperor can devote to the service of Italy. That army will consist of three different descriptions of men; namely, First, of 20,000 men brought from the Rhine, whose valour requires no eulogium. Secondly, of about 25,000, the wreck of the army of Alvinzy, whose spirit may be revived by their new commander, but who, otherwise, from the nature of things, after having been so frequently defeated, could not be much depended on: and thirdly, of 25,000 fresh troops, who have not had an opportunity of seeing service, but who will probably fight with as much zeal and steadiness as can be expected from raw soldiers. It is to be considered, however, that the Austrian army have these disadvantages to contend with, that they fight in a

barren country, that their provisions must be brought at a distance of above 200 miles; that their pay, in some measure, depends on the votes of the British Parliament; and, that they do not feel any cordial interest in the cause they fight for.

II. THE FRENCH ARMY.

The army of France in Italy, with the late reinforcements (exclusive of the garrisons) will also probably amount to about 70,000 men; one-third of which (27,000 men) are French; (including a numerous cavalry, from 8 to 10,000 men, equal to any in Europe); the other two-thirds (about 40,000 men) are Italians. The French consist of men already accustomed to conquest, or who have been regularly trained to arms. The Italians are not forced into the service, as some have confidently asserted, but are young men, who have voluntarily placed themselves under the command of their gallant countryman, are enthusiasts for the ancient glory of Italy, and determined sooner to die than to re-admit their former masters, from whom they entertain no hopes of mercy. There is also great emulation between the two nations, which of them will fight best, of which their able Commander will naturally avail himself. His troops have every advantage that an army can desire. Behind them, a fertile country, whence they can have abundance of provisions: the contributions of Italy furnish them with pay, ammunition, and every necessary article for carrying on the war: and to a man they burn with impatience, not only to preserve their former character and glory, but to acquire fresh laurels.

III. THE AUSTRIAN GENERAL.

The Archduke Charles, from his infancy, was considered as the hopes of the Imperial family. Whilst his brother, the present Emperor, was supposed to have the elevated mind, and the unconquered spirit of the House of Austria, is was foretold, from his earliest years, that the Archduke was possessed of the military talents of the family of Lorraine. It is the less necessary to dwell long upon this part of the subject, as his character, and in particular the conduct he pursued during the siege of Kehl, is so ably described, in a letter from one of the most distinguished Statesmen on the continent, that I cannot deny myself the pleasure of giving a translation of it in this place, in justice to the merits of so gallant an officer.

" The Archduke Charles has excited an enthusiasm in his army beyond expression, " and even the French give him daily proofs of their admiration and respect. Every " day, during the siege of Kehl, be the weather what it would, he set out from Offen- " burgh (where his head-quarters were,) at five in the morning, went to the trenches, " visited the camp, gave audience in a hut wrapt up in his *pelisse*; returned to Offen- " burgh at five in the evening, and continued occupied in business till nine. His " application and activity are beyond bounds. He is the soul of every thing, and has " given an impulse of zeal to the whole mass. Severe, but just, popular to excess, and " yet rigorous with respect to duty; he makes no exceptions but to merit, which he " searches for with such assiduity, that he has already promoted above 100 officers, " forgotten for these ten years past, without regard to titles, ribands of knighthood, or " great names. He is full of talents, penetration, and good sense. His intrepidity is " too well known to require any particular notice."

The character of the celebrated Buonaparte, I shall next endeavour to delineate, and at more length, as it is not so generally known.

IV. THE FRENCH GENERAL.

Napoleone Buonaparte was born in Corsica, but his family is of Tuscan extraction, originally from St. Miniato, about twenty-five miles from Florence. His father was one of the three nobles who represented the states of Corsica anno 1770, when deputies were first sent to wait on the king of France after the conquest of that island, on which occasion he acquitted himself with great ability. His son was born in 1767, and consequently, at this time (April 1797,) is about thirty years of age, short in stature, and rather thin or meagre, but with quick and penetrating eyes. He was educated at an Ecole Militaire in France, where he laid an admirable foundation for the acquisition of military knowledge; and ever since, he has made the art of war his particular study. He has a peculiar mode of arranging his troops, apparently in confusion, so that the enemy cannot discover, what his intentions are, how to attack him, or how to evade his attack; and hence, with inferior forces, he makes his opponents believe, that they have superior numbers to fight with. He is abstemious in living, fond of, and active, in business, which he carries on with the greatest regularity. He has four distinct secretaries for the following different departments, namely, the military branch of the army; its pay and expenditure, or internal economy; his political correspondence with the Directory, and with foreign states; and the police, or management of the conquered countries. He is ardent beyond every thing for military glory, and full of the most anxious zeal, to rival the heroes commemorated by Plutarch, whose works he is perpetually perusing.

The following circumstances are strongly in his favour, in regard to the success of this Campaign.

In the first place, the country where the war is now carrying on, is mountainous, which gives a great advantage to the active troops of France, over the slow and heavy battalions of Germany. Even the Croats, the Highlanders of the continent, who would otherwise have been admirably calculated for such a warfare, are now formed into regular corps, and have lost their characteristic activity and spirit. But that is not all. Greatly as this General has distinguished himself in the plains of Lombardy, a mountainous country affords peculiar advantage to a native of Corsica. Indeed Buonaparte from his birth has not only been accustomed to such scenes, but was actually tracing the military history of his native country, and ascertaining by what means the Corsicans were enabled, from the advantages of a mountainous situation, to make a stand, with inferior forces, against the best troops in Europe, when he was unexpectedly called to the siege of Toulon. There he so much distinguished himself, that the Directory were induced to trust him with the command of the army of Italy, as the only chance of retrieving their affairs in that quarter, at that time in the most desperate state, and which perhaps no other man could have accomplished.

2. No general ever existed possessed of greater resource in unexpected and critical cases. The intrepidity he shewed, (for I am told that singular anecdote is authentic), when with only 1200 or 1500 men, he was on the eve of being attacked by 4000 Austrians, can hardly be paralleled in history. He asked the officer who summoned him to surrender, how he dared to bring such a message to the General of the French army? and the Austrians, awed by the superiority of his genius, actually threw down their arms. Against a General possessed of the greatest activity, and such resources

of mind, no enemy is safe even for a moment, and there is hardly any state to which he can possibly be reduced, from which his talents may not extricate him.

3. Instead of being detested, he is admired and beloved by the Italians, who, though they hate the French, yet consider him in the light of a countryman, who has revived the ancient military glory of Italy. At first, considerable sums were certainly exacted from Lombardy, &c. but now, the contributions required from the countries in his possession, do not exceed those which the inhabitants paid to their former sovereigns in time of war ; and so prevalent is the spirit of democracy, that it is with great difficulty the French can prevent all Italy from becoming Republicans. The Jacobins were certainly anxious to spread their doctrines every where, but the present government of France have adopted a different policy. It is well known, that the Directory, would rather have given up Milan to the Emperor, under its old form of government, than have established a republic there, and actually refused to erect a republic at Rome, when it was lately completely in their power, and anxiously wished for by a majority of the people.

4. Though the French are jealous of the glory acquired by this Italian hero, and though, if he were to return to France, he might perhaps be treated with that ingratitude which is too often the characteristic of republican governments, yet his enemies do justice to his merit ; he contrives to make his very rivals to second his views, and to assist him with all the zeal imaginable. Indeed, the Directory of France, find it essential to their own interest, to give him every possible support, as there is none whom they could send to succeed him, with an equal prospect of success.

Lastly, he has excited an enthusiasm in his army beyond all example. His troops place the most unlimited confidence in him, and think, under his command, they cannot be vanquished. In addition to that confidence, they have such a respect and even terror for him, (for, with great affability, no man preserves stricter discipline), that they dread his reproaches more than the swords of the enemy ; and should every thing else fail, such is the attachment they entertain for his person, that he has only to put himself at their head, at any critical moment of imminent danger and dismay, as he did at Lodi, and if he does not perish in the combat, his troops, impelled by enthusiasm in the cause they fight for, confidence in the General who commands them, terror for his reproaches if defeated, and attachment to a leader whom they adore, can hardly fail to conquer.

THE RESULT.

From a consideration of these circumstances, any thing decisively favourable to the cause of Austria in Italy, cannot be expected. Indeed, if the French were unsuccessful, which there is no reason to look for, they have only to retire to the fortresses of Mantua, Verona, and others in their possession, whence, in the course of at least this campaign, it will be impossible to dislodge them. The only chance of ultimate success which the Archduke Charles has, is that of retiring towards Vienna, in which case, should Buonaparte incautiously follow him, he may be surrounded, and his army may be destroyed. But if he is satisfied with the possession of Italy, and the countries in its neighbourhood, no force the Emperor can possibly send against him, under any general, however distinguished for ability, can be successful.

London, 3d April, 1797.——N. B. The account of Buonaparte's victories did not reach London, or at least were not publicly known, till the Friday following the 7th of April.

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